Planting the Future: Developing an Agriculture that Sustains the Land and Community

Bird, Bultena, Gardner, Editors 1995

The shape of American agriculture is defined by federal farm policy and economics, whether we like it or not. And the argument is still raging whether we should substantially change conventional agriculture, the font of cheap and abundant food, into a more sustainable, environmentally sound approach, friendlier to family farms. This book is the findings of an exhaustive five-year socioeconomic comparison collectively conducted by a host of upper midwest academics and farm activists concerned with issues of rural development. The study was a reaction to the dearth of empirical information on how farm policy options affect farms and the profitability of sustainable agriculture.

Over the last fifty years our farm policy has reconfigured the rural landscape. As farms got bigger and more industrial, rural towns died, and people flocked to the cities. *Planting the Future* helps you understand the fine grain in the structure of agriculture—how specific practices and policies actually affect people in farms and rural communities—and presents some alternatives to the present course.

In a nutshell, the report found that sustainable farming was more conducive to maintaining vital rural communities and environmental quality, while conventional farmers earned higher net income and greater returns on equity. The book doesn't get into the full costs of modern farming that are not figured into the economic formulas: urban ills, pollution, and the agriculture industry's share of the cancer epidemic.

A comprehensive reference on sustainable agriculture, this is the best possible primer you could pick up if you want background information to help read between the lines in the current farm policy debate. It is full of detailed information on every aspect of sustainable agriculture and provides an in-depth look at alternative approaches to agricultural research, as well as making recommendations for future research and policy needs.—David Katz

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Fewer farms dot the countryside today. Fewer farming families practice their profession. Many rural communities are withering into economic depression. Yet, our nation enjoys an ample, inexpensive, and high-quality food supply.

The Sustainable Agriculture Initiative's mission was to study this irony and consider the options for fostering an agriculture that is economically, socially, and environmentally successful. Our research focused at the level of farms, farm families, and farming-dependent rural communities, because it is at these levels that the greatest doubt exists about the sustainability of our current agriculture.

330 words

Regenerating Agriculture
Policies and Practice of Sustainability and Sef-Reliance

Jules N. Pretty

A vision of how to make agriculture productive, environmentally sensitive and capable of preserving the social fabric of rural communities, this new work will serve very well as a general reference to the entire spectrum of issues related to sustainable agriculture.

The development of agriculture over the last 40 years has been driven by short-term economics, with government farm policy the driver of the development bandwagon. Jules Pretty does a masterful job of dissecting the development and problems of "modernist" agriculture, identifying the barriers to change. He draws together new evidence from researchers from all over the world to demonstrate the utility and importance of sustainable practices.

The late Bob Rodale, who did much to champion the development of organic farming and the sustainable ag movement, would be delighted to see this book. Bob preferred the term "regenerative" to describe the many approaches to sustainable agriculture, partly because it implies that the practice will always continue to evolve, fitting itself to regional needs and not being misled by policy directives or movement dogma.—David Katz

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Farmers of traditional and low input agricultural systems have long favoured diversity on the farm. Today, there is still a huge variety of mixtures cultivated, including cereals, legumes, root crops, vegetables, and tree crops. In Africa more than 80 per cent of all cereals are intercropped, producing in some cases highly complex patterns on the ground, with up to 20 species grown in close proximity. In Latin America, about 60 per cent of maize is intercropped and 80-90 per cent of beans are grown with maize, potatoes or other crops. In one field in the Andes in Peru, Robert Rhoades recorded

some 36 potato varieties growing in 13 rows. These were all shapes and sizes, and a variety of colours, including black, red, blue, purple, yellow and white. Altogether some 3000 traditional varieties are still grown by Andean farmers.